

East St. Louis Township Senior Citizens Activity Center (now Clyde C. Jordan Food Bank) and partners, Area Agency on Aging of Southwestern Illinois, Kenneth Hall Regional Hospital, and Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center & Foundation

The East St. Louis Township Senior Citizens Activity Center and its partners broke new ground to provide much needed nutritional and fitness education to 50 area seniors over the age of 60 through a 3-month research program- “Eating Better & Moving More.” A major achievement of the project was bringing together a partnership of organizations that were all committed to improving the quality of life for senior citizens. For the first time, resources were available to assist area seniors that would otherwise not have been available.

The goals of the “Eating Better & Moving More” program included improvement of health through small-sustained changes in nutrition; development of sustained physical activity, especially walking; and improvement in the overall physical and mental health, and sense of well being of older adults in the community. Activities to achieve these goals included weekly mini-talks by the local hospital dietician. Participants were encouraged to make small but steady changes in their diet, to include more calcium, fruits, vegetables, and fiber in their diet, and to try more exercise and walking. Participants were also given a weekly checklist to track dietary changes.

Supervised walking sessions were conducted twice a week at the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center to promote physical activity. Participants were given step counters and encouraged to walk daily. Seniors were also asked to increase their steps by 10 percent each week.

There were several key elements that brought seniors together to work toward achieving the goal of improved health and fitness and helped solidify working relationships. These included transportation provided by the senior center, a program coordinator funded by the hospital, travel expenses for a third staff member provided by the Area Agency on Aging, and the opening of the Jackie Joyner-Kersey youth Center to area seniors as a site for fitness activities.

The end result was lower blood pressure for 50 percent of the participants, increases in lap walking from 1 to 2 laps to 15, more fruits and vegetables intake, and improved mental status. The program also resulted in ongoing older adult programs at the Jackie Joyner-Kersey youth center.